## News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Tuesday, July 18, 2006

## **Wyoming Offers Mental Health Options for Children**

Parents of children with serious mental health issues will have more options to get help as the Wyoming Department of Health begins working with a Medicaid waiver approved recently by the federal government.

Because mental health care, particularly psychiatric hospitalization, can be quite expensive, some Wyoming parents have been forced to give up custody of their children so the costs can be covered through the state's Medicaid program (also known as EqualityCare in Wyoming).

"Many families could not afford the mental health services their children desperately needed, but also could not meet Medicaid's financial eligibility requirements," said Liz Mikesell, Medicaid waiver specialist with the Wyoming Department of Health's Mental Health Division. "To get help for their children, these parents were left with little choice but to relinquish custody."

Mikesell said the new federal waiver allows Wyoming's Medicaid program administrators to consider only the financial resources of an emotionally disturbed child who meets the level of care for psychiatric hospitalization to determine eligibility for necessary mental health services.

"We can help keep more families together and give parents more input in the decisions made regarding their children's care," Mikesell said.

Mental health services are frequently provided away from the family's home, schools and communities. "Every child with emotional disturbances has different needs and many will respond better to care if they can stay with their families. We're working toward making more treatment options available closer to home for added flexibility."

According to Mikesell, a few other states have established similar waivers and are seeing positive results. Wyoming's waiver program will be phased in over the next three years. Counties to be served initially include Laramie, Natrona, Fremont, Teton and Albany.

For more information about Wyoming's children's mental health waiver, contact Mikesell at 307-777-8627.

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